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Festivals 2.0: Consuming, Producing and Participating in the Extended Festival Experience.

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Introduction

This chapter provides a series of expanding perspectives on significant transformations that have shaped music festivals in recent years. More specifically we trace the ways in which different ways of engaging with festivals online can be seen as a reflection of wider socioeconomic factors that have shaped the relationships between festivals, festival-goers and the Internet. These include: the commercialisation, niche-ing and corporatisation of the music festival industry both on-and-offline over the past decade; the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, in particular the shift to user-generated content and participatory Web cultures; and, the ways in which participation online is, in turn, a manifestation of the wider practices of consumption and identity construction that characterise neoliberal and post-industrial society (Miller 1995; Walkerdine 2003). Drawing on material from a three-year study of music festivals and free parties we explore the ways in which festival-goers engage with different platforms online. More specifically, we focus on engagements with festival Web forums and the creation and sharing of festival videos on the media sharing site YouTube. By mapping the ways in which contemporary music festivals exhort festival-goers to engage with music festivals such that they both consume and produce – or co-create – the festival experience – and exploring whether and how this takes place online, we identify the ways in which online platforms extend and multiply the meanings and identities of festivals and festival-goers alike.

Festival nation part one: the social, cultural and economic significance of music festivals

With a long history dating back to the Beaulieu Jazz Festivals of the 1950s and 1960s, and the early Glastonbury Fayres of the 1970s (McKay 2000), music festivals have become an established feature of Britain's cultural landscape. The enduring cultural significance of music festivals is due, in part, to a prevailing festival mythology that emerged in the aftermath of prototype events such as the Woodstock and Monterey festivals in the late 1960s (Laing 2004). Much of this mythology is bound up with countercultural ideals and, in particular, the discourse of 'freedom' which is allied to the assumption that festivals should be free – from commerce and from the social and political structures and rules of everyday life (Anderton 2009). However, commerce has been bound up with festivals from the beginning – both Woodstock and its precedent, Monterey, were commercially funded endeavours, and Monterey paved the way for a relative surge in festivals in the USA (Laing 2004).

In keeping with these antecedents modern music festivals remain, by and large, commercial events. However, the past decade has seen the rapid expansion of the festival industry and an unprecedented commercial boom in festivals in the UK. Despite some variance in figures cited by different sources an estimated 600 - 700 events took place in 2010 reflecting a 71% growth in the festival market between 2003 – 2007 (Anderton 2009, Mintel 2010). However, unlike the antecedents of festival culture mentioned above, modern music festivals are complex, differentiated events (Purdue et al. 1997) that can be characterised in a number of ways. Anderton (2011) outlines several different festival typologies according to music genre (pop, folk, metal, dance, world music), location (pastoral land, urban parkland, holiday camps and other venues) and target audience or lifestyle (eco/green, family, grass roots), however, a key distinction is between long-established mega-events such as the Glastonbury, Reading

and Leeds, V, and Isle of Wight festivals, and smaller boutique festivals such as the Big Chill, Latitude, Secret Garden Party and End of the Road festivals which are aimed at particular niche markets. In this regard, the diversification of music festivals is only partly due to having to compete in a saturated marketplace (Kerr and May 2011) and largely due to the fact that music festivals have become commodities in and of themselves with a key status in the larger tourist and leisure industries (Stone 2009). These industries are heavily aligned with the experience economy and consumer reports (Mintel 2008, 2010) indicate that festival attendance is part of a prevailing trend towards affordable escapism whereby consumers are more willing to spend money on experiences than goods - although it should be noted that festivals also provide unprecedented opportunities for consumption; the side-stall aspect of festivals has grown exponentially in the last 20 years, and that it is now possible to spend large sums of money on clothing, jewellery, art, books and alternative healing. In addition to their status as 'experience products', the cost of attending a music festival – the average price of a weekend festival ticket with camping in 2011 was £180 (Samuel 2011) – means that they are increasingly targeted at ABC1s – a relatively affluent, white, middle class demographic highly attractive to marketers. The niche-ing and segmentation of music festivals is therefore an essential aspect of their marketing as 'experience products' that are congruent with the values and aspirations of this demographic.

Festival nation part two: the corporatisation of music festivals and neoliberal festival consumer-producers

The niche-ing of festival brands must be considered against the backdrop of the corporatisation of the festival industry over the past 15 years and, in particular, the monopolisation of this industry by the multinational live music and events company Live Nation. Live Nation's history since its inception in 2005 is largely one of relentless mergers

and acquisitions of other music promotions companies, notably Festival Republic (formerly Mean Fiddler Music Group), MCD Productions, DF Concerts and Gaiety Investments. During the period in which this research was conducted (2007 – 2010), Live Nation achieved a position of near-dominance in the music festival industry with outright ownership of the Global Gathering, Download, O2 Wireless, and Hard Rock Calling festivals; and shares in the Glastonbury, Reading and Leeds, Latitude, Electric Picnic, The Big Chill, V, T in the Park, and Oxegen festivals. Additionally, Live Nation extended its reach into the business of festivals with deals involving the merchandising and ticketing of festivals; while in 2007 Carlsberg-owned Tuborg lager became the official beer of Live Nation, with exclusive pouring rights at all Live Nation festivals.

A crucial aspect of the current monopoly of the festival industry – and, we argue, what renders it distinct from the historically commercial element of festivals – is that Live Nation and other promoters remain largely invisible as companies, preferring to promote festivals as brands instead. Live Nation's monopoly, has not led to the homogenisation of events under a common Live Nation brand, but rather, a process of segmentation in which different events have not only retained, but have enhanced their individual brands and invested heavily in 'boundary work' that differentiates them from other festival products. What, in turn, this 'boundary work' means for the identities of festival-goers can be further unpacked by discussing what Macleod (2006) refers to as the 'post-modern festival' as a reflection of late capitalism, or what Giddens (1991) and Rose (1989) respectively refer to as 'late modernity' and 'neoliberalism'. These are the terms variously used to conceptualise a series of profound shifts in the structures and institutions of advanced industrial societies over the past 50 years that have resulted in an erosion of traditional anchors for social and personal identities (Giddens 1991). In a well-established set of arguments theorists such as Giddens (1991),

Miller (1995), and Bauman (2007), argue that in the absence of these traditional anchors consumption is the primary basis for the construction of identities. It is theorised that we live in a consumer culture in which people increasingly constitute themselves through the consumption and display of goods and experiences (Belk 1995, Dittmar 1992, Walkerdine 2003). Choice and individuality are central to consumer culture whereby consumption promises unlimited ‘free choice’ as a means of expressing individuality and identity (Slater 1997). With regard to festivals it is therefore possible to identify a process whereby the freedom to choose, via careful segmentation, from a range of distinct festival brands with correspondingly distinct, tailored and preferred (niche) experiences, is simultaneously accompanied and enabled by drawing on an overarching mythology of festivals which promises its own set of freedoms and opportunities including, amongst other things, freedom from ‘everyday structures and systems’ (Laing 2004); the possibilities of hedonism and excessive consumption (Paterson 2006); authentic connections with others (Anderton 2009); and alternative expressions of identity and identity formation (Hetherington 1998). The experience economy requires consumers to be co-creators of their experiences, engaging in the production as well as the consumption of experiences, and as experience products encompassing multiple sites of consumption (Arvidson 2005) festivals constitute locations in which to both ‘consume and display [identity and] difference’ (Willems-Braun 1997). Here the experience of participation confers authenticity (Wang 1999), obscuring the corporate deployment of neoliberal imperatives around consumption and freedom, and adding further ballast to the notion of an archetypal festival experience. The expansion and diversification of festivals, and their embedding in the wider contexts of consumer culture and neoliberalism, is not confined to festivals as physical events. In the section that follows we go on to discuss the ways in which these processes are significantly mirrored and extended online.

The mediation and promotion of music festivals online

Websites dedicated to the promotion and coverage of festivals emerged shortly after the development of the first Internet browsers in the mid-1990s and have evolved in tandem with the Web, including the shift to Web 2.0, paving the way for the diversity of festival-related sites and content available today. The proliferation of festival content online can be understood in a number of ways – in part the Internet is an obvious forum for the myriad representations of the cultural significance of festivals (these will be described more fully further below); in part it is also a significant and necessary other realm in which to market and promote festivals. In spite or perhaps as a result of the rapid expansion of the festival market, consumer reports indicate that nearly a quarter of festivals failed during the 2003 – 2007 growth period signalling that long-term success is difficult to achieve in this intensified marketplace (Kerr & May 2011). Given the time frame of most festivals as 3 or 4 day events, strategies to ensure loyalty to the festival brand throughout the year have to be devised (Kerr and May 2011). Furthermore, this loyalty is even more vital in light of reports that the majority of festival-goers attend only one event annually (Mintel 2010).

According to Anderton (2009), the growth in outdoor festivals has been accompanied by further growth in the mediation of these events, pointing to the importance of television and radio in the ways in which festivals are marketed and received – and the Internet is fast becoming one of the most significant sites of festival mediation. Promoters now consider the Internet to be the primary channel for raising awareness of festivals (Kerr and May 2011, Kozinets 1999). The reach of the online marketing and mediation of festivals becomes apparent when we consider that the demographic for broadband Internet access – 58% of adults in the UK with a bias towards the middle class and the young and middle-aged –

overlaps with the primary demographic of festival audiences (Mintel, 2008). According to a survey by the Association of Independent Festivals 64.5% of festival-goers find out about events online (Mintel 2010). One example is the Camp Bestival website which was reported as the most popular festival website in 2010 with 73% of attendees using the site for information about the festival (Mintel 2010). The imaginatively designed website (<http://www.campbestival.net/>) is visually appealing and busy. The design draws on a range of imagery which marries the otherworldly and carnivalesque with the reliable and everyday – albeit a taste-distinct version of the everyday including real ale and cake, tea and coffee tents – in a rural setting. Text boxes in the topmost corners declare: ‘We’re all going on a festi-holiday’ and ‘Camp Bestival – winner best family festival 2008 – 2010’. A very brief exploration of this website thus highlights the way in which online marketing works to promote and consolidate the distinctiveness of festival brands while reprising countercultural imagery and the associations attached to a larger festival mythology (Anderton 2009).

Alongside the general mediation of festivals online – including the whole gamut of multimedia content and coverage which is available on demand twenty-four hours a day – the promotion of festivals online therefore shapes and obscures the nature of festivals as commodities. This obscuration has been aided by the shift to a more interactive participatory Web in recent years. One way of realising the objective to raise brand awareness and foster brand loyalty is through the deployment of interactive content which enables a relationship to be forged between festivals and festival-goers online (Kozinets, in Kerr and May 2011). Moreover, the production and consumption of experience (central to neoliberal consumer identities and selves) discussed above is mirrored in the emergence of participatory web cultures online, in what has become known as the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.

Participatory web cultures

In its simplest form the term Web 2.0 can be used to characterise the shift from a text-based read-only Web to an interactive, participatory and social multimedia-based Web. boyd (2009) defines the social web as a “collection of software that [allows] individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share, and in some cases collaborate or play”. Familiar examples of Web 2.0 platforms that utilise such software are: blogging and micro-blogging sites (Twitter); media-sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr); and social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, Bebo) amongst many others. While the use of such platforms is not ubiquitous, several popular Web 2.0 sites account for a large percentage of all Internet traffic.

The ethos of the social web is informed by two significant cultural shifts: a radical erosion of the boundaries between the public and the private, and the move to the active creation of content or what has become known as user-generated content. A characteristic feature of many Web 2.0 platforms is that they involve the routine sharing of personal information as the basis of membership, friendship and belonging – for example, social networking and micro-blogging sites in which users update their profiles and post updates on what they are feeling, doing, thinking, reading etc. In this regard, Snee (2008: 3) states that “personal lives are increasingly exposed in Web 2.0 applications as part of a broader cultural shift towards openness and changing notions of privacy”. Bauman (2007) conceives the broadcasting of personal experience and information on Web 2.0 as the technologically extended and amplified practice of a ‘confessional society’ – a society in which identity is continuously and publically updated and displayed in the most public of ways because to do otherwise would risk social exclusion (in Beer and Burrows 2010: 7) and, arguably, entail a negation of identity. The second significant cultural shift is the shift towards user generated content and active participation and collaboration in the production, recycling and remixing of online content (Anderson 2007; Snee 2008). Anderson (2007: 14) argues that Web 2.0 entails a

change in the way in which data is viewed, which is increasingly as a resource that “can be repurposed, reformatted and reused”. This change in perception and practice, Anderson (2007) argues, can be compared to the DIY ethos associated with Punk in which young people took control of the production and promotion of their own entertainment and content by forming bands and writing fanzines etc. Consequently, people now see themselves as the creators of, and experts on, the online representations of their experiences and identities and Anderson (2007: 15) argues that this poses a significant challenge to perceptions of “who has the authority to ‘say’ and ‘know’”.

The shifts outlined above are emblematic of the eroded distinction between producers and consumers (Bauman 2007, Beer 2008, Beer and Burrows, 2010). Furthermore, theorists such as Beer (2008), Fuchs (2011), and Chouliaraki (2010) have argued for the radical notion that what is entailed in the public creation and consumption of personal or user-generated content is nothing short of the marketing and commoditisation of the identities and selves that are constructed thereby. Hence Bauman (in Beer 2008: 625) argues:

the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are themselves ... They are, simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote. They are, at the same time, the merchandise and the marketing agents.

Chouliaraki (2010: 227) refers to the broadcasting of self online, “the mediated participation of ordinary people in public culture”, as ‘self-mediation’ and both acknowledges and critiques the notion that this offers a new avenue for democratisation. Chouliaraki conceptualises the construction of a spectacular public space (constituted by still and moving images, sound, text etc.) along the lines of Arendt’s (in Chouliaraki 2010: 228) notion of a ‘space of appearance’ - a contingent space that is created by people doing things together, that involves performance and recognition, and a “collective ‘mirroring back’ of specific

claims to identity” including claims to mundane or ordinary citizenship. However, she argues that self-mediation is a deeply ambivalent process in which the articulation and recognition of authentic citizenship, selfhood or social connection can be appropriated by “neoliberal discourses of consumerism that increasingly marketise these spheres” (Chouliaraki 2010: 228). Drawing on Turner, Chouliaraki (2010) argues that the democratic potential of the ‘space of appearance’ may just as easily be appropriated by market forces in the service of private profit, whereby self-mediation is:

at worst a corporate strategy that trivialises [insert relevant sphere] in the name of a narcissistic celebration of the ‘private, the ordinary, the everyday’ (Turner 2010: 22), and, at best, a form of ‘unpaid labour’... .

In Turner’s view there is little room for the transgressive DIY/expert possibilities posed by the new forms of authorship Anderson (2007) conceives in relation to Web 2.0. However, despite this somewhat pessimistic view, we have seen (in the citizen journalism that has documented the Arab Spring, or this summer’s UK riots) that the interactive, readily accessible, and difficult to regulate environment of Web 2.0 also entails the possibility for broadcasting alternate and sometimes (politically) contested versions of events.

In the field: researching festivals on-and-offline

The research study forming the backdrop to this chapter, *Negotiating managed consumption: Young people, branding and social identification processes* (ESRC RES-061-25-0129), explored how young adults negotiated different forms of marketing, branding and ‘managed consumption’ in two youth leisure sites, namely, music festivals and free parties (illegal raves), and how this impacted on their social identities and networks. The study was conducted over 3 years (2007 – 2010), in two stages, with stage one focusing on music festivals and stage two focusing on free parties. The case studies combined an innovative range of research methods and included an online ethnographic or netnographic (Kozinets

2002) study of postings on festival-related web forums, a web-based ‘mapping’ of the organisational structure, corporate involvement and marketing practices associated with each festival, on-site ethnographic observation and ‘market mapping’ of leisure and consumption spaces documented using photographs, systematic field notes and found artefacts, on-site group discussions with festival-goers and off-site discussions with free party-goers. After embarking on the initial netnographic observation of web forum postings we realised the full significance of online representations and constructions of festival experiences, which extended well beyond Web forums and included the use of a number of Web 2.0 platforms. The discussion that follows is based on our initial netnographic observations focusing in particular on two different platforms – the eFestivals web forum and YouTube – to explore how the affordances of each shape the interactions of festival-goers, and what the implications might be for the identities of festivals and festival-goers. While this chapter focuses on the impact of the Internet on engagement with music festivals, it is worth noting that free parties and free party networks have a significant presence online despite their non-commercial, illegal and secretive nature. The use of the Internet by free party networks is divided in relation to the use of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 platforms and is explored elsewhere (Morey, Bengry-Howell and Griffin, 2011).

The music festival landscape online: a snapshot

The enormity of online festival content prohibits an exhaustive description; instead we provide a snapshot of available content ahead of a more detailed examination of two platforms and the kinds of interactions each enable. Several years after the emergence of the first Internet browsers in the mid-1990s, Neil Greenaway created *The Original Glastonbury Festival Website* in 1998. This was later transformed into the well-known *eFestivals* (<http://www.efestivals.co.uk/>) website, which retained the original Glastonbury content but

provided coverage of a much wider range of festivals. A year later in 1999 the rival *Virtual Festivals* (<http://www.virtualfestivals.com/>) website was launched by Steve Jenner with both websites featuring news, reviews, listings, photographs and interviews on music festivals. Both eFestivals and Virtual Festivals host discussion forums that are, broadly, subdivided into general festival-related chat areas and specific forums dedicated to many of the major UK and some international festivals taking place each year.

In addition to comprehensive and long-established websites like eFestivals and Virtual Festivals, archival websites such as *The Archive: UK Rock Festivals 1960 – 1990* and *Fat Reg's Festies* (<http://www.ukrockfestivals.com/>, <http://www.fatreg.com/index2.html>), both established in 2000, were other early frontrunners of festival-related content online. The former is an archive of photographs and information about a wide range of UK Rock and Free Festivals that took place in the decades spanning 1960 – 1990, the latter focuses solely on the Reading Festival serving as an archive of photographs, information about line-ups, and a Reading Festival Timeline amongst other things. Unlike the official festival websites and social media sites that exist today, the sites above are very much examples of the previous, Web 1.0, incarnation of the Internet – personal websites administered by individuals passionate about particular festivals or periods in festival history featuring static (rather than interactive) published content. Existing on a continuum between websites characteristic of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 are a large number of unofficial fan sites for particular festivals, for example: Reading Festival Fans (<http://readingfestivalfans.co.uk/>) which is geared towards providing up-to-date information about each year's festival (line-up rumours and listings, information about tickets etc.) without necessarily archiving this information. Newer and current festival-related content includes coverage provided by news and media sites such as the BBC's extensive Glastonbury website

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/festivals/glastonbury/2011/>), the Festivals Guide provided by the New Musical Express (<http://www.nme.com/festivals>); and, of course, the large number of official festival websites. Official websites serve as the main portals to many major festivals online, but many festivals also have ‘official’ profiles or pages across a range of Web 2.0 sites. For example, on Twitter alone Glastonbury festival is represented by its official profile, GlastoFest (<https://twitter.com/#!/GlastoFest>), the profiles of people involved with the festival such as Emily Eavis (<https://twitter.com/#!/emilyeavis>) and Worthy FM (<https://twitter.com/#!/worthyfm>), and the profiles of fans of the festival such as Glasto_biz (https://twitter.com/#!/glasto_biz) and GlastoCountdown (<https://twitter.com/#!/GlastoCountdown>). Glastonbury also has an official channel on YouTube (<https://twitter.com/#!/GlastoCountdown>) and its own Facebook profile (<http://www.facebook.com/glastonburyofficial>). This is not to mention the vast amount of unofficial user-generated content shared by festival-goers across these and other Web 2.0 platforms – for example, the Glastonbury Festival group pool on Flickr in which users can upload and share their photos of the festival (http://www.flickr.com/groups/glastonbury_festival/pool/).

Festival forums: learning to be a year-round festival-goer

A number of festival forums exist for current and prospective festival-goers to communicate with each other by posting or commenting on a variety of threads (topics) with discussions ranging from the generic to particular aspects of festivals. The aggregated eFestivals website includes a widely used and well-known festival forum. The forum has a sizeable membership with 112, 649 members, and an archive of (1,182,773) posts at the time of writing, and is recognised as an authoritative source for festival-related information:

eFestivals is a really useful website for anyone hunting for festival tickets, travel information and rumours on who's playing. It's also good fun, post-event, when the

messageboards fill with people sharing hygiene horror stories, offering their opinions on Linkin Park's set or looking for someone they lent £20 to outside the Japanese noodle stand at 3am (*The Guardian Guide*, 19th June 2004).

The forum is subdivided into a number of subsections or sub-forums. The main 'Festivals' section contains dedicated forums for particular festivals including, amongst others, Glastonbury, Reading and Leeds, V, T in the Park, Download, Isle of Wight, Sonisphere, Rock Ness, Guilfest, and Beautiful Days, as well as forums for 'other UK festivals' and 'international festivals'. Additionally there are also several other sections – a dance forum, the wibble forum (for general discussions unrelated to festivals), and a general forum (for practical or administrative issues.)

There is a seasonal regularity to festival forums, which tend to be dominated by certain topics at different times of the year. At the time of writing the 2011 instalment of the Reading festival is set to take place in the very near future. A quick look at the 30 threads or topics on the first page of the Reading forum reveals that these are dominated by questions about the buying and selling of tickets (unlike Glastonbury, Reading tickets can be purchased and sold, depending on availability, right up to the event), as well as questions about whether certain items can be brought into the festival arena, requests for help and information, questions about utilities and services on-and-off site, questions about car parking, and questions about which of the designated camping zones is the best to camp in. This sharing of information is one of the key functions of festival forums, whereby 'newbies' can ask regular festival-goers for advice on matters such as what to pack, or how to cope with the various demands of the festival experience (the swapping of tips and horror stories about festival toilets are a perennial favourite in this regard). Forum members are assigned a different status, displayed above their usernames, depending on the overall number of posts they've contributed to the forum. The assigned categories are ranged on a continuum that designate a member's

commitment to festivals, ranging from ‘addicted’ (100+ posts), to ‘festival freak’ (1, 000+ posts), to ‘lives in a field’ (5,000+ posts). In the period just after the festival the threads are largely concerned with the sharing of experiences of the festival, for example: ‘Well that was good then ... restored my faith in Reading’ ‘Kings of Leon – discussion of their set’, and ‘Pineapple! Pineapple! Never laughed so hard’. At a different point again, roughly mid-way between the last and the next festival and at the start of the festival season, forum threads contain a combination of shared reminiscences about previous festivals and anticipation of the festival to come: ‘Carnage – what’s been the worst year’, ‘Crappy things that happened to you in 2010’, ‘Headliner hints from Melvin Benn’ and ‘Weather thread’.

While festivals forums are primarily text-based, they often contain embedded or linked multimedia content such as photos and videos. These can be: uploaded prior to an event, as part of the preparation for, and anticipation of, the festival; taken during the festival and uploaded from the site; or edited after the festival and shared with forum members (and anyone else who cares to see them). A familiar forum topic that is often revived in the run-up to festivals, particularly Glastonbury, concerns the organisation of collective camping by forum members. The designated campsite is identified and located through the use of a distinctive tent flag which is photographed and uploaded onto the forum for the benefit of other interested parties. In a similar vein many forum members create their own tent and stage flags and upload photographs of these to the forum prior to festivals. A remarkable and unanticipated use of the forums prior to festivals was the creation and sharing of festival site maps. This practice ranged from the adaptation and editing of official maps to reflect personal preferences (for example, maps pin-pointing the position of bars selling ale on-site), to the creation of entirely new types of maps (contour maps showing the best places to camp should it rain). As with the sharing of information mentioned above, the discussions and

collaborations that take place on festival forums both underscore and enable a great deal of (pre-emptive) planning and organisation prior to the festival itself.

On the whole festival forums can be read by anyone with access to the Internet; however, as suggested by the discussion of status categories above, active posting or commenting requires membership of the forum. Generally speaking registration is a fairly easy and quick process requiring the electronic furnishing of basic details and signalling agreement with the terms and conditions of the forum. Typically forum terms and conditions contain a set of statements prohibiting the posting of offensive or explicit content – generally reflecting offline norms and etiquette around the use of discriminatory language and other causes of offence in social settings. However, while the process described above applies to membership of the eFestivals (and other) forums, this process can be different when it comes to membership of forums attached to *official* festival websites. In this regard the Reading festival forum contains a lengthy statement concerning the forum's terms of use and code of conduct. Crucially these terms discourage the discussion of contentious or 'unpleasant' behaviour at the festival, as well as any negative comments about the promoter Festival Republic:

We would appreciate it if discussion of unpleasant matters was kept at a minimum - there is no need for ****[sic], sexual assault, drink spiking or other horrible subjects to be discussed - certainly not in jest - and anyone found doing so may have action taken against them. ... Please also remember that most of this forum is open to guests and is Google-indexed. While you may feel that you are amongst a group of close friends sometimes, the truth is that many unwanted eyes may be viewing your posts. We really don't know who is browsing, so try to refrain from leaving comments that could be taken out of context - if only for your own sake. The last thing many of us would like to see is a tabloid paper running a front page story about the satan worshipping, drug taking, sexual deviant and downright strange alternative lifestyles of "heavy metal fans". It would be all too easy for a journalist who has an axe to grind and looking for an easy scoop to do a little lazy research and take things out of context on purpose.

Insults to Festival Republic. No one is saying you have to like the bill that has been put together, or the way the festival is organised, or the way that announcements are made. You are free to express your opinion about the organisation and so on freely.

However, personal insults and threats to Live Nation staff are not acceptable. Insults and threats will simply not be tolerated. And if you think it is that bad? Then just don't go along... There are hundreds of festivals in the UK these days. Surely one of them you might like (<http://forums.readingfestival.com/register.aspx>)

The terms set out above seem defensive and, comparatively speaking, heavy-handed in tone. They signal a much more explicit approach to the moderation and regulation of forum content whereby the notion of a shared and co-created community space which is more-or-less self-regulating is undermined. This underscores the importance of, and contingency around, representations of festival brands online. As many official websites feature the names of festival sponsors (usually large alcohol or telecoms companies) there is a need to mitigate against any negative associations that might spring from talk, or other content, on forums. However, forums also represent an easy, accessible portal for brands wishing to promote their products inexpensively. The Gaymers cider brand pre-empted their entry into the festival marketplace by posting and initiating conversations on various festival forums in 2008. Conversely, often a loyalty to brands perceived to be part and parcel of the festival experience – such as Brother's Cider at Glastonbury – means that forum members often conduct this conversation and promotion themselves.

Broadcast Yourself: The User-Generated Festival

While festival forums are interactive, and both produced and consumed by forum members, they are relatively static in comparison with social media and media sharing sites such as YouTube. YouTube is a public video sharing site that allows users to watch and share videos as well as commenting on them and connecting with other users (Lange 2008). YouTube has an established policy about the kinds of content it allows and disallows, however, the sheer enormity of content uploaded to the site everyday, and the existence of technology for downloading material from the site, renders the moderation and regulation of this content

more difficult. In this regard, YouTube's own user statistics reveal astounding figures with 48 hours of content uploaded nearly every minute (or 8 years of content per day) and over 3 billion videos viewed per day. Furthermore, its status as one of the major social media sites is signalled by reports that on average more than 400 tweets containing a YouTube link take place every minute, while 150 years worth of YouTube videos are watched on Facebook daily (Elliot 2011). While a large percentage of this material is professional or industry-created content, the platform's 'broadcast yourself' tagline underscores the central premise of uploading and sharing self-created or amateur video content. YouTube is replete with festival-related content. As mentioned earlier, most festivals have their own official channels on YouTube, while the major broadcasters that cover festivals (such as the BBC, the NME, and Channel Four) broadcast festival footage on their own YouTube channels. In the midst of all the official festival footage to be found on YouTube are the large numbers of videos created and uploaded by festival-goers themselves. This footage takes a variety of forms including short clips (usually shot with a mobile phone) of funny incidents or bands on stage, but also, significantly, short films depicting the journey or story of a festival experience. An example of the latter is Room41more's '*Reading 2008 (Savage)*' video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlz7_smEYKs) uploaded directly after the end of the festival on the 29th of August 2008 with 1,930 views. Like many of these kinds of videos, the footage centres on the social and playful aspects of the experience with clips focusing on members of the friendship circle and their activities in the campsite. An amalgamation of photos and video clips edited together with an accompanying song from one of the bands on the 2008 line-up; the video portrays both a particular and authentic/generic festival experience using all the stock-in-trade devices of promotional music videos (editing, text, song). We contacted several festival-goers on YouTube to ask why they created films of

their festival experiences; one festival-goer who uploaded a video of his 2008 Glastonbury experience (<http://youtu.be/D6tKcCuhGYI>) gave the following account:

Re: Glastonbury video

Before I went to my first Glastonbury I had no idea what to expect from the "wonderland" which takes place over 1000 acres. I could not comprehend the size of this festival and what to expect so turned to YouTube for other people's experiences which helped me out so much. When I returned I found I could not put into words just how great it was so thought it would be a good idea to try and show people by putting all my pics and videos together. When I'm old and in a nursing home somewhere, it's always nice to know I could show my Gran [sic] kids that even their Granddad was a young man once and had a great life. I suppose we all want to leave something behind and not be forgotten don't we? Of course I also did it to look back at the place I feel happiest, knowing I can relive the happy memories at a click of a mouse.

The video received a number of favourable comments and feedback from viewers such as 'What a beautiful impression of the atmosphere. I bookmarked it to relive this year's festival whenever I feel like it. thank you!' However, not all videos created a favourable impression. Both Reading and Leeds have annually experienced campsite disturbances at the close of the festival on Sunday evening, with discussions of these 'riots' taking place on festival forums and in the press. In the aftermath of the 2008 festival a number of 'riot' videos were uploaded to YouTube by festival-goers. As we were tracking these events as part of our netnography at the time we noticed that several were taken down shortly after being uploaded to the site. We contacted the respective festival-goers to ask why their videos were no longer available and got the following response:

'Re: video unavailable?

Hey

Youtube took it off and got a warning that if i upload it again my account would be deleted. I can always send the video by email or something if needs be'.

Another video, Reading Riot 2008 (<http://youtu.be/hNDZ7jFr0EQ>), featuring footage of fires, exploding gas canisters, the destruction of toilet blocks and tents, and a police presence – is edited with atmospheric music (Let The Bodies Hit The Floor by Drowning Pool) and accompanying text at the end which calls for enhanced security features and a safer Reading festival in 2009. Interestingly this video was not removed by YouTube and has been very

popular with 37,335 views to date. However it did receive some negative comments from other viewers and festival-goers:

‘good footage but whats with the edit? song choice and slow motion, its like ur trying to make it look “cool”.’

YouTube’s Community Guidelines include the right to remove inappropriate or violent content. It is unfortunately unclear whether the removal of ‘riot’ videos by YouTube merely reflected the enforcement of these guidelines, or whether this was at the behest of a festival promoter. Despite the aforementioned attempts many removed videos were simply renamed and uploaded again by their creators several days later, while, in the meantime, many other viewers had the opportunity to download and disseminate the videos before they were removed.

Mediated festivals/mediated festival-selves

A central focus of this chapter has been to explore how music festivals are extended online and, specifically, how this is enabled by the interactive and participatory environment of Web 2.0. In order to explore this fully it has been necessary to describe the nature of contemporary music festivals (as experience products), and the music festival industry (as a largely corporatized and monopolised entity), and to situate these against the wider socioeconomic backdrop of late modernity and neoliberalism. The chapter’s central premise – of festivals as experience products targeted at and chosen by festival-goers, and that offer festival-goers the freedom to both consume and produce their festival identities and experiences – has been unpacked in relation to both offline and online festivals. The erosion of the traditional distinctions between producers and consumers has been noted in relation to both; however we argue that the production and consumption of festivals online does not merely reflect but, as a

result of the enabling technologies and corresponding demands of Web 2.0, extends in significant ways the creation and display of festival identities and communities.

Festival forums enable an extension of outdoor festivals, as temporally and geographically bounded events, to events that can be experienced – anticipated, celebrated and re-lived – all year round. The sharing of information, provision of advice, collaboration and planning that takes place on forums speak to the co-creation and co-ownership of a shared festival experience. Membership and assigned statuses (‘addicted’, ‘festival freak’, ‘lives in a field’) allow for the display of an identity that is mirrored and consolidated by other members and wider readers. Furthermore, the official recognition of the number of posts contributed by members highlights the importance of the communal and social nature of the forums.

However, the mundane citizenship and social participation bestowed by the acts described above can also be seen in the light of individual self-interest and competition – the re-creation and sharing of festival maps and the exchange of information about flags and planned camping ensures that a ‘good space’ is secured for oneself and one’s group. Furthermore, the extension of festivals on forums does not occur outside the realm of commerce or the domains of sponsors and festival organisers. Both our interviews and our monitoring of discussions on festival forums revealed that the majority of festival-goers were unconcerned about the sponsorship of festivals, with many regarding sponsorship as a necessary evil that secured the future of festivals. While not all festival organisations have the resources to host their own forums, most view forums as essential ways of monitoring the preferences and practices of their target audiences – as evidenced by the participation of Gaymers cider. The unprompted promotion of brands, such as Brother’s cider, associated with festivals also points to the ease with which the kinds of virtual relationships envisaged by festival

promoters, sponsors and brands are enabled online. Moreover even unallied sites such as eFestivals collect revenue from corporate advertisers and festival promoters and it is clear that festival organisers consider these sites to be of worth in terms of predicting the consumption patterns of festival-goers.

The production and consumption of amateur festival videos represents both an individual wish to ‘leave something behind’ or ‘not be forgotten’, and the possibility of reliving a shared experience. Both speak to an extension of self beyond the temporal – beyond the duration of the festival event itself *and* beyond the present, into an imagined future – and the geographical, where the neoliberal duty to tell oneself or to be intelligible as a certain kind of self, in this instance as a Glastonbury festival-goer, is called into being and cemented by repeated viewings. Here is evidence of Arendt’s (in Chouliaraki 2010) ‘space of appearance’ which allows for the performance of, and collective recognition and mirroring of identity, but which is nevertheless also a contingent space. In this regard, the regulation of festival forums and removal of content from media sharing sites such as YouTube disrupts the conceptualisation of Web 2.0 as an unproblematically democratic space.

Following from the above, the reception and perception of the campsite disturbances as ‘riots’ at the Reading and Leeds festivals, echoed and reinforced by comments accompanying the YouTube video discussed above, point to the assimilation of this content by a wider, dominant discourse of riots that not all festival-goers, or not those taking part in these events, necessarily share. While these events are undoubtedly a source of anxiety or annoyance for some, the reactions of the festival-goers captured on the video reflect the excitement and pleasure of this part of the festival experience for some. Many of the Reading festival-goers we interviewed referred to the importance of the atmosphere, and spending time with friends

in the campsites, as the primary part of their festival experience. Furthermore, some articulated a trade-off whereby festival-goers complied with the high charges for entry, and thereafter for food and drinks on-site, in lieu of festival organisers turning a blind-eye to the goings-on in the campsites. Given the steps taken to maintain the security of festival sites, in particular the strict policing of entry only by those with tickets, festivals and the demarcated zones within them remain fairly contained ecosystems over the duration of the festival. Consequently the availability of ‘riot’ videos on YouTube radically extends the reach and duration of these events, and scuppers attempts at containment. The renaming and re-uploading of these videos evidence’s Anderson’s (2007: 15) argument regarding users of Web 2.0 taking control of the production and promotion of their own entertainment, as well as the challenging of perceptions about “who has the authority to ‘say’ and ‘know’”.

A final and crucial point concerns the extension entailed in the mediation of festivals online to the mediation or broadcasting of festival selves and identities online. This broadcasting amounts to a display of identity that is perhaps less about broadcasting the festival and more about broadcasting the (festival) self. Stated differently, in the interactive space of Web 2.0, festival-goers are both the producers and consumers of content but – more importantly – this content is not solely about festivals but about festival-goers themselves. This shift in perspective entails the extension of festivals and festival brands as commodities to the active identity displays of festival-goers on Web 2.0 platforms as the commodities being marketed and consumed summoning Turner’s (in Chouliaraki 2010) argument about unpaid labour and the appropriation of user-generated content by market forces.

Unlike the virtual relationship marketing entailed in the prompted and unprompted promotion of brands on festival web forums, this appropriation is not always straightforward as the

identities on display are not always congruent with festival brands and identities. This tension reveals both the commercial possibilities and the challenges inherent in young people's production and consumption of 21st Century leisure practices and cultural identities.

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